

# Meeting communiqué, 2–3 November 2018

## Advisory Committees for the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area



### BACKGROUND

The Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area is a serial cross-jurisdictional property consisting of some 40 reserves across northeast NSW and southeast Queensland including the iconic Lamington, Springbrook, Main Range, Mount Barney, Border Ranges, Wollumbin, Nightcap, Washpool, Gibraltar Range, Dorrigo, New England, Oxley Wild Rivers and Barrington Tops National Parks.

Inscribed on the World Heritage list for outstanding universal value, it contains remnants of the rainforests that once covered the supercontinent of Gondwana and now contains endemic relict species found nowhere else in the world and closely related to those in the fossil record from millions of years ago. The dramatic landscapes tell the story of the development of the continent, including the Tweed Shield volcano, which is the best-developed erosion caldera in the world. The diversity of habitats and ancient species mixing with those newly evolved, makes this area one of Australia's biodiversity hot-spots containing the most important habitats for species of outstanding universal value for conservation and science.

The Gondwana Rainforests Advisory Committees are appointed by the NSW and Queensland environment ministers to provide advice to the ministers and managing agencies on the protection and management of the World Heritage property. The chairs of the Advisory Committees are jointly appointed by the NSW, Queensland and Australian Government environment ministers. There are two Advisory Committees: a Community Advisory Committee appointed to provide advice on the protection and management of the property from the viewpoint of the community, and a Technical and Scientific Advisory Committee appointed to provide advice on the scientific basis for conservation management of the property, including advice on research and monitoring.

The Gondwana Rainforests Advisory Committees met in Gloucester on Friday 2 November and Saturday 3 November. The first day was a field trip into Barrington Tops to discuss management of the World Heritage Area, hosted by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. The second day was a meeting in Gloucester. The following notes outline key points from the meeting.

### FIELD VISIT COMMENDATIONS AND CONCERNS

The Advisory Committees commend the passion and commitment of the NPWS staff who hosted the Advisory Committees' visit to Barrington Tops. The presentations about their work and the park were exceptional. Their knowledge of park values was detailed and comprehensive, including the extent and condition of rainforests and populations of threatened species. It was evident that the NPWS team are dealing with a variety of challenging management issues and threats to values and are using various approaches to try and protect, conserve and present the World Heritage values of the park.

The Advisory Committees were concerned about the obvious presence of **feral horses and feral pigs** in the park and the **damage to habitats by both**. Horse and pig damage to a threatened ecological community and to the habitat of threatened species was clear. The Advisory Committees recommend the removal of the horses and pigs as a matter of urgency, particularly as they are vectors for dispersal of some of the most serious pathogens and weeds in the park, creating a negative feedback loop and a deteriorating spiral of loss of World Heritage values. This is emphasised by the density and extent of **Scotch Broom** (*Cytisus scoparius*) across the plateau, as well as the presence of *Phytophthora cinnamomi*.



More resources are required to deal with these multiple and very obvious threats to the World Heritage values of Barrington Tops.

The significance of Barrington Tops was clear when the fungus, *Cyttaria septentrionalis* (pictured to the right), was observed on Antarctic beech trees in Honeysuckle Picnic Area. The genus *Cyttaria* co-occurs on Antarctic beech trees in New Zealand and South America and the relationship between individual species of these plants, both current and in the fossil record, has provided considerable information about how the flora of the Gondwanan continents has developed over the millions of years since the breakup of the Gondwanan supercontinent.



The Advisory Committees are also concerned that with climate change, the likelihood of damage to rainforest communities from wildfire is increasing, as well as the potential for too-frequent fire in the surrounding sclerophyll communities at Barrington Tops.

## MEETING REPORT

### IDENTIFICATION – EXTENSIONS TO THE GONDWANA RAINFORESTS

- The Advisory Committees' working group investigating the progression of the Gondwana Rainforests (extensions to an existing property) on Australia's Tentative List recommended that additional areas be considered for assessment as proposed extensions. Accordingly, the Advisory Committees **recommend inclusion of Barrington Tops and Copeland State Conservation Areas (SCAs)** in the assessment and that a review of these SCAs be undertaken to investigate the feasibility of their change of tenure to national park.
- The Gondwana Rainforests Advisory Committees recognise the **need for the managing agencies to partner with the multiple Indigenous nations and language groups** across the Gondwana Rainforests World Heritage Area. This is important for reconciliation, to identify cultural values associated with the World Heritage Area, to improve management and presentation of the estate, and as the next step in progressing extensions to the estate. The Advisory Committees encourage the state and federal agencies to commit to moving forward with Indigenous engagement as a priority.

### PROTECTION – EPBC ACT-CONTROLLED ACTIONS

- While the committees await the outcome of the **EPBC determination on the Scenic Rim Trail proposal**, members continued to be concerned about aspects of the proposed development in the Gondwana Rainforests – particularly as the issue of precedence is now material given recent announcements of similar proposals in other Queensland World Heritage Areas. A working group is scoping the issues associated with the proposed development, including the likelihood of the development setting a precedent leading to cumulative impacts across the Gondwana Rainforests and other World Heritage properties in the longer term.
- The Advisory Committees note the report and submission on the **Stevens Group Iluka development proposal** forwarded to the Department of Energy and Environment by the Community Advisory Committee Chair. The committees are concerned about the potential impact of the development on the outstanding universal value of the property.

- The Advisory Committees note with interest the development of the **Tweed Hinterland walk** and commend the initiative of the NSW government in trying to reduce the impact on Wollumbin. The committees look forward to further updates about the project and to providing advice as required.

#### CONSERVATION – EMERGING THREATS

- The Advisory Committees welcome the release of the **Queensland Biodiversity and Ecosystems Sector Climate Change Adaptation Plan** and look forward to supporting the development of a Gondwana Rainforests climate change adaptation strategy. The committees noted that some of the actions to understand climate change impacts are not well supported and given the gravity of the impacts now unfolding, commend the agencies for their climate change initiatives in relation to the property.
- The Advisory Committees commend the work by the **Earth Systems and Climate Change Hub (ESCCH)** of the National Environment Science Program in supporting adaptation planning in a portion of the World Heritage Area in south-eastern Queensland, and encourage the development of further tools including downscaled projections and a Relative Humidity spatial layer. The committees commend Tricia Waters, Executive Officer for the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia WHA, for facilitating the involvement of ESCCH scientists in the climate modelling and adaptation planning for the property.
- The Advisory Committees established a **climate change working group**, with the first task being identification of key species for further assessment of potential climate change impacts. The committees will also be seeking updates from managing agencies about projects mapping ecological buffers and refugia to support the protection and management of the Gondwana Rainforests in NSW and Qld.
- The Advisory Committees discussed **commercial water extraction** in the Tweed Caldera, which appears to be an increasing threat to the property. The committees are concerned about extraction proposals that may affect groundwater-dependent-ecosystems in Springbrook National Park, including the iconic Springbrook leatherwood tree, *Eucryphia jinksii*, which occurs in gullies. Monitoring the discharge of catchments draining the property would provide important baseline data for detecting the impact of water extraction approvals, as well as the impact of climate change in the longer term. A letter will be sent to the ministers about the potential impacts of groundwater extraction on the property, particularly given the combined risk of cumulative impacts from multiple extractions across the property and the changing climate.
- The Advisory Committees noted that the **new NPWS structures** in NSW are now in place and appreciated and found very useful the overview of management issues being dealt with by NPWS staff across the Hunter Central Coast Branch. The branch is dealing with a wide range of issues including significant co-management arrangements.

#### PRESENTATION – INTERPRETATION AND PROMOTION

- The Advisory Committees applaud the Department of Environment and Science for their work to promote understanding of the World Heritage values of the Gondwana Rainforests, and look forward to the completion of these products in time for the **25<sup>th</sup> anniversary** of the listing of the property.
- To maximise opportunities for visitor experiences and benefits to regional economies, it is recommended that appropriate **signage** is maintained across the property to support state-of-the-art communication about values and extend the interpretation of the property. A separate letter will be sent to ministers seeking information about current interpretation plans and signage manuals so that the Advisory Committees can provide targeted advice about branding, interpretation and promotion of the property.

## STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

- The Advisory Committees note the progress with the draft **Strategic Management Framework**. The committees look forward to its completion, and will seek an update on progress at the next meeting, along with an update on the recent **State of the Parks** reporting.
- A separate letter will be sent to ministers expressing concern about a lack of action in the development of a **whole-of-property monitoring program** for key attributes of Outstanding Universal Value as a foundational requirement for effective management of the property. New developments in citizen science may provide opportunities for the agencies to develop an efficient and effective monitoring framework, and a working group is investigating these aspects.
- There is also an opportunity for **monitoring using a 50-year dataset** and Advisory Committee members are investigating funding options.
- The Advisory Committees have formed a working group to provide feedback on the **2018 IUCN World Heritage Outlook** report with the intent of developing a package to assist the IUCN in the next round of reporting.

## GOVERNANCE AND COMMUNICATION

- The chairs were pleased to be invited to the recent Department of Environment and Energy World Heritage workshop in Canberra and appreciated the opportunity to receive the updates provided about national and international World Heritage issues, including the significance of the World Heritage Committee's 2015 Policy on the integration of a sustainable development perspective into the processes of the World Heritage Convention ('Sustainable Development Policy').
- The Advisory Committees were disappointed that a DoEE representative was unable to be present at the joint meeting in Gloucester, as DoEE input and advice is highly valued. The committees seek the continued participation of DoEE in Advisory Committee operations as, consistent with the inter-governmental agreement, Commonwealth involvement is needed to support interstate, coordinated management of this serial, cross-jurisdictional property.

Separate letters will be sent to provide more detailed advice on the following matters:

1. The emerging threat to the property of groundwater extraction
2. The need for coordinated effective monitoring of the condition and trend of key attributes of OUV
3. DoEE representation at Advisory Committee meetings
4. The need for appropriate signage across the property.

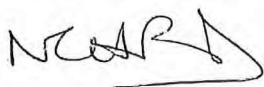
The Advisory Committees are pleased to support the continued efforts of the NSW, Qld and Australian Governments to transmit the outstanding universal value of the Gondwana Rainforests to future generations.

Sincerely,



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The Hon Leeanne Enoch MP  
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ADVISORY COMMITTEES

22 January 2019

**Re: The potential impact of groundwater extraction on the Gondwana Rainforests of Australia World Heritage Area**

Dear Minister Enoch,

At the meeting of the Gondwana Rainforests Advisory Committees on November 3, members discussed **commercial water extraction** in the Tweed Caldera. We wish to alert you to this as an emerging threat to the property. There is particular concern about extraction proposals that may affect groundwater-dependent ecosystems in Springbrook National Park, including the iconic *Eucryphia jinksii*, the Springbrook Leatherwood, a rainforest tree confined to gullies and listed under the Queensland *Nature Conservation Act 1992* as endangered.

Water extraction is an issue that is likely to recur with potential cumulative impacts across the property. The Advisory Committees recommend referral of proposed extraction activities to ensure a comprehensive assessment of potential impacts on the outstanding universal value of the property. The committees further recommend that, consistent with The Australian World Heritage Intergovernmental Agreement (clause 4.4c), all relevant local government areas be reminded to ensure that World Heritage protection and management is specifically considered when preparing regional plans and determining development applications.

We have forwarded copies of this letter to Ministers Upton and Price given their respective responsibilities for the protection and management of the Gondwana Rainforests. Should you or your advisors wish to discuss any of the matters raised above, we have provided our telephone numbers and email addresses below.

Yours sincerely,

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cc. The Hon Melissa Price and the Hon. Gabrielle Upton